

Derek Wallbank, *MinnPost*

WASHINGTON — There were cheers in the streets of Washington as the news broke, primarily over Twitter and then through reports by major news outlets like CBS News, the New York Times and CNN. A crowd that gathered outside the gates of the White House chanted "USA! USA!" and sang the national anthem.

At 11:35 Eastern time, President Obama stepped to the podium in the East Room of the White House and confirmed it. "Tonight I can report to the American people and the world that the U.S. has conducted an operation that killed Osama Bin Laden," Obama said.

Osama bin Laden, the architect of the Sept. 11 attacks, is now dead, along with three others who were killed in a raid at a compound in Pakistan, in a town outside the capital of Islamabad. U.S. forces recovered his body and suffered no casualties.

Charlie Rybak, a Minnesota native and senior at George Washington University, joined the crowd outside the White House that swelled to thousands after Obama finished speaking.

He said it was a very young crowd — 90 percent students by his estimate — and Gadsden flags that have become synonymous with the Tea Party flew while the throng chanted "Yes We Can," the slogan famously adopted by Obama's 2008 campaign.

"Everyone is on the same team again," Rybak said.

Nonpartisan reaction

Of course, with less than two years until the next presidential election, politics is never far from any situation involving the president. Yet tonight, it was a nonpartisan reaction from all of the

contenders.

Tim Pawlenty and Mitt Romney were among the GOP contenders who included Obama by name in their list of those thanked for bringing bin Laden to justice. "This is terrific news for freedom and justice," Pawlenty said. "America will never shrink from the fight and ultimately those who seek to harm us face only defeat."

"Justice was served," said Rep. Tim Walz, the highest ranking enlisted man in Congress, crediting U.S. forces who have served in the hunt against bin Laden, including some in the Minnesota National Guard who are in Afghanistan now, while warning that the fight isn't over.

Rep. Betty McCollum said today was "the most significant blow to al Qaeda in the nearly 10 years since the terrorist attacks on 9/11/2001," adding that bin Laden's death is a "just end to a mass murderer who targeted innocents and destroyed so many lives."

"The killing of Osama Bin Laden brings a measure of justice for the families of all those lost to his senseless terrorism, including Tom Burnett's family in our own state. Burnett, a passenger on Flight 93, courageously fought back against the Bin Laden led hijackers," agreed Sen. Amy Klobuchar. "Since 9/11 Bin Laden taunted our country for over a decade and our prayers and gratitude are with our courageous counterterrorism agents and troops that tracked him down and brought him to justice."

Rep. Michele Bachmann, a member of the House Intelligence Committee, actually reacted to the death on Facebook in advance of Obama's statement. "Usama Bin Laden dead! May this be the beginning of the end of Sharia compliant terrorism," she wrote.

"I want to express my deepest gratitude to the men and women of the U.S. military and intelligence community," Bachmann said in a more detailed statement e-mailed after Obama spoke. "Their persistence and dedicated service has yielded success in a mission that has gripped our nation since the terrible events of 9/11. Tonight's news does not bring back the lives of the thousands of innocent people who were killed that day by Osama bin Laden's horrific plan, and it does not end the threat posed by terrorists, but it is my hope that this is the beginning of the end of Sharia-compliant terrorism."

"This is a great day," said Sen. Al Franken. "I think every American feels very emotional about what happened in Pakistan today. Our hearts are full of pride and gratitude for all those responsible for bringing Osama bin Laden to justice, with sadness as we remember that horrific day ten years ago, and with hope as we go forward in our fight against radical jihadism. I think the president was wise to remind us of how unified we felt as a nation after 9/11 and how we can achieve anything we put our mind to if we work together."

Rep. Erik Paulsen wrote on Twitter, "Thanks to our troops and intelligence officials for their tireless work going after bin Laden."

Rep. John Kline issued this statement: "Nearly 10 years ago America suffered one of the most horrific attacks on her people in our nation's history. Thanks to the tireless and heroic efforts of our troops and intelligence officials, Osama bin Laden — the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks — is dead. While the world is now free from one truly evil man, we are still at war with Islamist extremists. We must remain increasingly vigilant, and continue to support our brave sons and daughters in uniform as they courageously battle a determined enemy."

Rep. Chip Cravaack said in a statement: "I applaud the amazing men and women of our military and our intelligence agencies who have worked for almost 10 years to make sure Osama bin Laden — the perpetrator of the worst terrorist attack in American history — was finally brought to justice for his heinous crimes. This may not end the threat posed to us by global terrorism, but it is a clear victory for America and freedom loving people throughout the world."

And here's a statement Gov. Mark Dayton released:

"The death of Osama Bin Laden is great news. I congratulate President Obama and the American soldiers, who successfully carried out this crucial mission.

"As a member of the US Senate Armed Services Committee, I traveled to Afghanistan in January 2002, just three weeks after American forces had routed the Taliban. There I saw a large warehouse, where all of the American intelligence services had initiated a coordinated effort to locate and eliminate this mastermind of the terrible attacks of 9/11. Finally, over nine

years later, they have succeeded.

"Since then, over 22,000 heroic Members of the Minnesota National Guard have deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, and other locations around the world to defeat terrorism and defend freedom. They deserve to share in the pride for this successful mission.

"I have instructed Minnesota's Commissioner of Public Safety Ramona Dohman to redouble our vigilance in the next weeks to assure Minnesotans are fully protected from any repercussions from this incident."

Not yet done

A final end to bin Laden's life had been a long time coming, yet Obama and intelligence officials cautioned that this isn't the end of the War on Terror.

Bin Laden was wanted in connection with the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993, the "Black Hawk Down" incident in Mogadishu, Somalia, and the bombing of the USS Cole. After 9/11, he became the most wanted terrorist in the world, the face of pure evil in many minds in a way not seen since Adolf Hitler. There was a \$25 million bounty on his head, yet he still wasn't killed until eight years to the day after President George W. Bush declared "Mission Accomplished" from the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln.

"It still feels like yesterday that the towers fell and our country was never the same again," said University of Minnesota senior Jenny Ngo. "It is hard to believe that it has been 10 years, I was 12 when the attacks occurred and now I am almost 22.

"As Americans we can go to bed now feeling a little safe and those that fell on 9/11 can rest assure that justice has been served."

Of course, this isn't over, not by a long shot.

Questions will rightly be asked about how bin Laden was living in a populated city, in a million-dollar compound built in 2005. U.S. officials notably didn't seek the permission of Pakistan's government to conduct a raid in their country, and questions have already been aired about how he could have lived in such a population center without anyone knowing. The suspicion, whispered loudly but not said firmly, is that some in Pakistan did know but decided not to say anything about it.

And officials braced for potential blowback. Shortly after his death was confirmed, the State Department issued a warning to Americans abroad that there could be some backlash "given recent counter-terrorism activity in Pakistan."

Obama cautioned that there was far more to be done in the fight against terror, but allowed himself a moment of reflective celebration.

"As a country, we will never tolerate our security being threatened, nor stand idly by when our people have been killed. We will be relentless in defense of our citizens and our friends and allies. We will be true to the values that make us who we are.

"And on nights like this one, we can say to those families who have lost loved ones to al Qaeda's terror: Justice has been done."